

74 JEWISH CONTRIBUTION TO CIVILISATION

Marranos who, converted to Christianity by force during the persecutions at the close of the fourteenth century and in the following three decades, still remained at heart, in most instances, faithful to the religion of their fathers. The most prominent of them was the learned Diego de Deza, later Inquisitor General, who, notwithstanding his Christian zeal, belonged to a family which originated in the *juderia*; the latter introduced him to Abraham Zacuto, the astronomer (below, pp. 76-9), whose discoveries were utilised to such good effect by the explorer later on. A striking contrast to Deza was Don Isaac Abrabanel, the last scholar-statesman of Spanish Jewry, who occupied an important position in the financial administration of the country, yet devoted all his leisure to Jewish studies. His associate, Abraham Senior, last Crown Rabbi of Castile, was likewise a staunch supporter of the explorer. More influential still was Luis de Santangel, Chancellor and Comptroller of the Royal Household, a great-grandson of the Jew Noah Chinillo of Calatayud. Gabriel Sanchez, another of the most fervent supporters of the expedition, was similarly of full Jewish origin, being son of a *converse* couple and nephew of Alazar Ussuf, of Saragossa. Among Columbus' other patrons were Alfonso de la Caballeria, member of a famous Marrano family and Vice-Chancellor of Aragon, and Juan Cabrero, the Royal Chamberlain. Indeed, the only one of the high officials intimately

concerned with the genesis of the expedition
belonging
to an "Old Christian" house was the royal
secretary,
Juan de Coloma, whose wife was, however,
descended
from the Jewish clan of De la Caballeria.

It was this group which rallied round
Columbus when
he seemed faced with failure and was
preparing to leave
Spain for good. Santangel secured him an
audience with
the Queen and, representing to her the
advantages which